

the horn of NO HOPE

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The slow, painful and daily death of one of the planets most majestic creatures, the Rhinoceros, who has lived on the earth for 60 million years is an alarming wake up call. At the current rate of about one death every 20 hours, these rhinos will be extinct in 10 years. How has this tragedy happened? And what are Authorities, Governments and animal rights activists doing to stop it?

There are 5 different species of Rhinoceros. These harmless animals live in Africa and southern Asia. The Javan rhino species was declared extinct in October 2011. The only predator to the animal is a human poacher. The IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List declares that three of the species are critically endangered.

The current population of rhinos in Africa is 20,150 southern white rhino and 4,200 black rhinos. Over the past 45 years, poachers have wiped out 100,000 rhino in Africa. Reserve own-



ers and officials believed that rhinos would be able to survive in national parks and reserves in Africa, however rhinos are being poached in even these habitats.

A single rhino horn fetches almost a quarter of a million US dollars on the black market. Its market is Asian countries' where they believe the horn to have medicinal properties. In Yemen it has traditionally been seen as a status symbol to have a rhino pouch, however, this market has since been nullified by the Asian demand. Rhino horns are made of keratin, the same protein that makes up human hair and fingernails. It has been scientifically proven that the rhino horn has no medical value.

Demand is rising for China and Vietnam. According to the Lawrence Anthony Foundation in South Africa, the Minister for Health in Vietnam claimed that rhino horn cured him of cancer. Vietnam is now the pre-eminent black Market for rhino horn in Asia. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) rhino horn has often been used in formulas. The horn is used in shavings or powder form to treat fever and rheumatism. There are, however, alternative animal shavings that can be used in replacement of rhino horn, according to modern TCM practitioners.

In a recent advertisement by Humane Society



International Dr Nguyen Huu Truong at Back Mai Hospital in Hanoi stated that there is no medical reason for using rhino horn. Further to this, Dr Albert Lim Kok Hooi, a cancer specialist, explains that people with cancer need to see a specialist urgently because rhino horn will not cure cancer or any other illness.

As the rhino horns are being bought and sold on the black Market, International Trade Law largely banned trafficking in 1976, according to Greg Hardesty in a recent article. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe recently stated, "Rhino horn traffickers continue to fuel the illegal demand for horn—demand that has led to hundreds of rhino deaths and put the white and black rhino in danger of extinction in the wild."

The Lawrence Anthony Foundation, started in 2011 by the late Lawrence Anthony, is dedicated

to the conservation of black and white rhino. According to Yvette Taylor there, in 2008, 83 rhinos were shot and illegally killed by poachers. In 2009, it was 122, by 2010, it rose again to 333 and in 2011, it was a staggering 488. Over 159 rhinos have already been killed in 2012.

Rhino killing is organised crime. Poachers use helicopters and state-of-the-art weapons. In a recent interview on NBC, Tom Millieen, Traffic (the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network) rhino horn expert in South Africa, explained that a rhino poaching operation can be as quick as 24 hours. He explained that poachers are in and out of the reserve, couriered to the airport, sometimes even in official vehicles, and the horn is in Asia and on the Market within a day.

When a rhino is captured it is possible to remove the horns by tranquillising the animal rather than killing it. Mandi Jarman from Aquila Private Game Reserve in South Africa explains that poachers are darting rather than shooting because the noises of rifles can be detected by officials. This has led to rhinos dying slowly and painfully.

This dire situation is being aggressively battled. World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Rhino Program Manager Dr. Joseph Okori told AllAboutWildlife.com that, "Just stopping the poachers does not address the root cause of the poaching, but rather is just dealing with the symptoms of a chronic

problem. In short, it will not make a significant difference to the poaching crisis in South Africa as long as the demand for rhino horn is not addressed and the highest criminal networks that propagate this unacceptable practice are not disrupted and eventually put out of action." WWF is in ongoing conversation with the Chinese Government in an attempt to address the situation.

According to Dr Richard Thomas from Traffic

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many private land owners and game rangers have taken steps to protect their animals, while government authorities have stepped up their efforts to curtail rhino poaching. Dr Thomas explains that Vietnam has the unenviable reputation as the key player in rhino horn demand so it is certainly important that the issue is addressed there. Traffic is also actively facilitating talks with both the South African and Vietnamese governments about securing a legal crackdown on poaching and collaboration between the two countries.

Some game reserve owners have resorted to cutting the horns off themselves in a measure to protect their animals. However, poachers have resorted to killing them anyway to find stumps

that remain. Horns also re-grow.

Organisations like Wildside Warriors and Saving Private Rhino, which is an Aquila Private Game Reserve initiative, are rising to the challenge. The Saving Private Rhino team was able to save 2 rhinos in August 2011.

The South African Army have been deployed into the Kruger National Park to protect the rhino. These soldiers also help guard many private reserves to defend the rhino against poachers as private rhino owners are also finding it increasingly more expensive to protect their animals. They use helicopters and are on ground around-the-clock. Traffic and WWF are supporting authorities and rangers.

It is believed that US military radar detection equipment could be vital in the fight against rhino poaching in South Africa. DICEROS (an anti-poaching and advanced management system company), Wildlife ACT and Stone Holding



Photo by Aquila

(a security design company) have conducted research for a solution that does not harm the rhino. They want to build a virtual fence. This project is looking to stop poachers from even entering the areas of the rhinos. Traffic, however, argues that the poaching gangs are highly organised and extremely quick. The long term goal and key to resolving the poaching crisis has to be to shut off the demand from Asia.

Untangling this well organised operation is a heroic undertaking. As justly said by Dr Richard Thomas from Traffic, "The cost of hiring anti-poaching personnel is insignificant compared to the cost of losing these magnificent animals".

This insanity will only be stopped if the Asia Market can be convinced that there is absolutely no benefit in rhino horn and the governments mount huge advertising campaigns and higher penalties on those involved in illegal trafficking. It needs to be explained in clear terms that these majestic animals will be extinct if this does not stop.

Further information and donation possibilities can be found on these websites:

www.lawrenceanthony.co.za
www.iucn.org
www.traffic.org
www.aquilasafari.com
www.savingprivaterhino.org